

5-133

A
SHORT ADDRESS

TO THE

PUBLIC,

UPON

A SUBJECT of the utmost IMPORTANCE to the future
SAFETY and WELFARE of the BRITISH DOMINIONS.

BY
THOMAS SHERIDAN, A.M.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. DODSLEY, Pall-mall; C. DILLY, IN THE
POULTRY; AND T. EVANS, IN THE STRAND.

MDCCLXXXIII.

[Price SIXPENCE.]

SHORT ADDRESS

TO THE

PUBLISHED

BY

A subject of the
Society and War



THOMAS SHIRLEY A.M.

LONDON

PRINTED FOR J. DODDSEY, PALM-MALL, C. DICKINSON, IN THE
COURT, AND T. EVANS, IN THE STRAND.

ADVERTISING

[The end of the world]

SHORT ADDRESS, &c.

AS his Majesty, in his late Speech from the Throne, was graciously pleased to call on all honest men, to deliver their sentiments freely on the present distracted state of affairs in this country, I think myself bound by a double tie not to remain silent on the occasion. In the first place, as having enjoyed, during the space of many years, his Majesty's bounty, granted, without any solicitation on my part, to encourage me in the prosecution of a plan formerly laid before the Public, which was then considered by the Minister, as likely to be productive of great benefit to these realms; and which I am now, after infinite labour in the preparation, ready to carry into execution. In the next, because I have the clearest conviction in my own mind, grounded on the authority of some of the greatest men this country ever produced, among which are the respectable names of Milton, Locke, Berkley, Addison, Swift, and many others, that I can lay open the chief source of all our disorders, and point to adequate remedies. Such as have been prescribed of late, are only topical applications to external tumours, and would prove at best but mere palliatives—

Which will but skin and film the ulcerous part,

While rank corruption, mining all within,

Infects unseen.

B

There

There can be no hopes of a cure without reaching the source of the disease; nor is this hard to be found: though, through the blindness of prejudice, and tyrannic power of custom, it has hitherto been concealed from all eyes, except a few of a more liberal turn of mind, who have chosen to be guided by the clear and steady light of reason, instead of the dazzling blaze of fashion.

No one, who has at all considered the subject, if asked what chiefly forms men to good or evil, but will readily answer—*Education*. One would imagine, therefore, when a State becomes highly disordered, when the manners and principles of a nation are universally corrupt, that the first step towards a reformation would be, to examine the state of Education in that country, as being the source of manners and principles; the fountain from which flow all that constitute the dignity or debasement of human nature, and the principal cause of the characteristic difference between nations, as well as individuals. Upon a close examination it would appear, that in no civilized country in the world, was there ever so preposterous a course of Education, as that at present established in England. It is neither suited to the nature, end, or principles of our constitution; and indeed how is it possible it should be, when it was established long antecedent to the very idea of such a constitution, in times of popery and arbitrary power, and calculated wholly for the monastic life: consequently, it does not fit a man for any one office, station, or profession in the world; and the only posts, which they who have passed through an entire course of English Education are qualified to occupy, are those of a schoolmaster, a fellow of a college, or a private tutor.

Such seed as you sow, such shall ye reap: and it would be as vain to expect forests of oak from haws, or crops of wheat from chaff,

chaff, as that able statesmen, wise and uncorrupt senators, or virtuous citizens, should be produced from such seminaries. It is allowed on all hands, that, for a long time past, each succeeding generation has improved on the former in all manner of vice, till the measure of iniquity is almost full; and this must continue to be the case, while that mode of Education remains unaltered, till it ends in the final ruin of this once happy country. Many fatal symptoms of its near approach have of late appeared. The rapid decline of this lately great empire, in so short a space of time as is not to be paralleled in the history of the world; the tide of luxury which has deluged the land, with all its attendants, universal profligacy of manners, factions, convulsions throughout the realm, all the prognostics which have ever preceded the ruin of free states, have come heavy and thick upon us. Alarmed by the near prospect of so fatal an event, numbers of well-meaning men have echoed the word *Reformation, Reformation*, through the land. And in what is this proposed reformation to consist? In making some changes in the laws relative to one branch of the constitution. And are we still so blind as to look for our constitution in the dead letter, the paper model, when we ought to know that it is a living one, built up of men, and, according as they are adapted, or otherwise, to their several stations, the edifice must either remain firm, or moulder away, and at length tumble down? Shall we still trust to parchment bonds, which experience has shewn are as easily snapped asunder by the giant Corruption, as the threads, with which his hands were bound, were by Samson? No reformation therefore can be of any avail, but that of men; and this with regard to such as are advanced in life, who have taken their bent, and whose habits are grown inveterate by time, would be found an impracticable task. What gardener is so absurd as to try to force old trees into regular espaliers, while the pliant young ones obey

his forming hand, and take what beat he pleases. Let us therefore turn our thoughts to the rising generation, where alone reformation can begin with any prospect of success. Let us endeavour to establish such a mode of Education as is described by Milton, where he says——‘ I shall detain you no longer in the demonstration of what we should not do, but strait conduct you to a hill-side, where I will point you out the right path of a virtuous and noble Education; laborious indeed at the first ascent, but else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospects, and melodious sounds, on every side, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming. I doubt not but ye shall have more ado to drive our dullest and laziest youth, our stocks and stubs, from the infinite desire of such a happy nurture, than we have now, to hale and drag our choicest and hopefulest wits, to that asinine feast of sow-thistles and brambles, which is commonly set before them, as all the food and entertainment for their tenderest and most docible age. I call therefore a complete and generous Education, that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and of war.’

From such an institution, we might reasonably hope to see the rising and future generations, in an opposite direction to those who have preceded them, emulously contending who should excel most in every quality that can adorn private life, and render them useful members of the community. In them we might expect to find wise and able statesmen, steady and incorruptible patriots, firm supporters of our noble constitution, and an impenetrable bulwark against the foes of their country; and this would be the sure way, as the great Bishop of Cloyne has, it is hoped, prophetically observed,—‘ Not only to prevent our final ruin, but

‘ also

also to render us a more happy and flourishing people than ever.

As it is probable I shall be charged with presumption for so bold a censure of institutions rendered venerable by age, and shall have to encounter the blind prejudices of numbers who were formed by them, I think it necessary to shelter myself under the authorities of such names as few will dare to dispute. And first, I shall present to view the picture drawn by Milton of our mode of Education, in his close nervous style.

As for the usual method of teaching arts, I deem it to be an old error of universities, not yet well recovered from the schoolstick grossness of barbarous ages, that instead of beginning with arts most easy, and those be such as are most obvious to the sense, they present their young unmatriculated novices at first coming with the most intellectual abstractions of logick and metaphysics: so that they having but newly left those grammatick flats and shallows, where they stuck unreasonably, to learn a few words, with lamentable construction, and now on the sudden transported under another climate, to be tossed and turmoiled with their unballasted wits in fathomless and unquiet deeps of controversy, do for the most part grow into hatred and contempt of learning, mocked and deluded all this while with ragged notions and babblements, while they expected worthy and delightful knowledge. Till poverty or youthful years call them importunately their several ways, and hasten them, with the sway of friends, either to an ambitious and mercenary, or ignorantly zealous divinity. Some allured to the trade of law, grounding their purposes, not on the prudent and heavenly contemplation of justice and equity (which was never taught them) but

' but on the promising and pleasing thoughts of litigious terms,
 ' fat contentions, and flowing fees. Others betake them to
 ' state affairs, with souls so unprincipled in virtue, and true ge-
 ' nerous breeding, that flattery and court shifts, and tyrannous
 ' aphorisms, appear to them the highest points of wisdom; instilling
 ' their barren hearts with a conscientious slavery, if, as I rather
 ' think, it be not feigned. Others, lastly, of a more delicious and
 ' airy spirit, retire themselves, knowing no better, to the enjoy-
 ' ments of ease and luxury, living out their days in feast and
 ' jollity; which indeed is the wisest and safest course of all these,
 ' unless they were with more integrity undertaken. And these are
 ' the fruits of mispending our prime youth in the schools and uni-
 ' versities as we do, either in learning mere words, or such things
 ' chiefly as were better unlearned.'

Now hear what the candid and judicious Locke has said on the
 same subject: in speaking of the Education of a Gentleman, he
 says, ' Since it cannot be hoped he should have time and strength
 ' to learn all things, most pains should be taken about that which
 ' is most necessary; and that principally looked after, which will
 ' be of most and frequentest use to him in the world.

' But it is no wonder if those who make the fashion, suit it to
 ' what they have, and not what their pupils want. The fashion
 ' being once established, who can think it strange, that in this,
 ' as well as in all other things, it should prevail? and that the
 ' greatest part of those, who find their account in an easy sub-
 ' mission to it, should be ready to cry out heresy, when any one
 ' departs from it? 'Tis nevertheless matter of astonishment, that
 ' men of quality and parts should suffer themselves to be so far
 ' misled by custom and implicit faith. Reason, if consulted with,
 ' would advise, that their children's time should be spent in ac-
 ' quiring

' quiring what might be useful to them, when they come to be
 ' men, rather than to have their heads stuffed with a deal of trash,
 ' a great part whereof they usually never do ('tis certain they
 ' never need to) think on again as long as they live; and so much
 ' of it as does stick to them, they are only the worse for.

' This is so well known, that I appeal to parents themselves, who
 ' have been at cost to have their young heirs taught it, whether it
 ' be not ridiculous for their sons to have any tincture of that sort
 ' of learning, when they come abroad into the world; whether
 ' any appearance of it would not lessen and disgrace them in com-
 ' pany? And that certainly must be an admirable acquisition,
 ' and deserves well to make a part in Education, which men are
 ' ashamed of, where they are most concerned to shew their parts
 ' and breeding.'

It is evident that both these great men thought our method of
 Education was productive of evil, instead of good; of mischief to
 mankind, instead of benefit. But among such as have received
 no ill taint from it, I believe it will be allowed by much the greater
 part, that they never find either profit or pleasure from it during
 the rest of their lives.

Upon their entrance into the world, a very short experience
 will convince them that they cannot apply what they have
 been learning to any useful purpose; that to succeed in life they
 must enter upon entirely new studies, and that they must even
 have the double labour of unlearning many things which they
 before thought the perfection of human knowledge. Their Greek
 and Latin authors, their books of logic and metaphysics, &c.
 are laid aside, and in a few years all the traces of their early ac-
 quirements,

quirements, of so many years pains and labour, are wholly obliterated. Is it not a lamentable thing, to think that the prime of life hath thus been lost; that a fertile soil hath thus been tilled, and manured, at great pains and cost, and such seed sown as will never produce a valuable crop? Or is there reason to wonder, that the richness of the soil should waste itself in a luxuriance of weeds? Of the few, who, from a love to the arts in which they have been trained, would still keep them alive in their memories, and display their talents to the world, much the greater part serve only to increase the number of bad versifiers, miserable essay-writers, and minute philosophers. The studious and contemplative minds, indeed, may be furnished with matter to employ their leisure hours in innocent amusements, so that they may not be hurtful members of society, however useless; and this perhaps is the greatest benefit which the Public derives from it. The divine, the lawyer, and the physician, may convert these rudiments of science to their own advantage in their several professions; but the gentleman, finding no immediate use for them, neglects, and of course soon forgets them. Thus the Education of a Gentleman, which is of all others the most important to the Public, is not at all provided for. Were it defective in all other arts and professions, though the grievance would be felt, it might be attended with no danger to the State. But Gentlemen, born to be legislators, to be the bulwarks of our constitution; to fill up posts which require wisdom, conduct, and the most improved abilities; to animate and give motion to the whole body of the people; to be an example and model to all; the fountain of manners and source of principles; if their education be defective, or bad, the whole constitution is affected by it: the disease has attacked the vitals, and must either be removed, or inevitable dissolution must follow.

Mr.

Mr. Locke, in his Epistle Dedicatory to his Treatise on Education, has the following passages: ' I myself have been consulted
' of late by so many, who profess themselves at a loss how to
' breed their children; and the early corruption of youth is now
' become so general a complaint, that he cannot be thought
' wholly impertinent, who brings the consideration of this
' matter on the stage, and offers something, if it be but to excite
' others, or afford matter of correction: for errors in Education
' should be less indulged than any. These, like faults in the first
' concoction, that are never mended in the second or third, carry
' their afterwards incorrigible taint with them, through all the parts
' and stations of life.

' The well-educating of their children is so much the duty and
' concern of parents, and the welfare and prosperity of the na-
' tion so much depend on it, that I would have every one lay it
' seriously to heart; and, after having well examined and distin-
' guished what fancy, custom, or reason advises in the case, set his
' helping hand to promote every where that way of training up
' youth, with regard to their several conditions, which is the
' easiest, shortest, and likeliest to produce virtuous, useful, and
' able men in their distinct callings; though that most to be taken
' care of, is the gentleman's calling. For if those of that rank are
' by their education once set right, they will quickly bring all the
' rest into order.'

In his Treatise on Education, he says, ' I wish, that those who
' complain of the great decay of Christian piety and virtue every
' where, and of learning-acquired improvements in the gentry
' of this generation, would consider how to retrieve them in the
' next. This I am sure, that if the foundation of it be not laid

* in the education and principling of the youth, all other endeavours
 * will be vain. And if the innocence, sobriety, and industry of
 * those who are coming up, be not taken care of and preserved,
 * it will be ridiculous to expect, that those who are to succeed
 * next on the stage, should abound in that virtue, ability, and
 * learning, which has hitherto made England considerable in the
 * world."

Hear also what he says on the finishing part of our Education,
 that of Travel: "To put them out of their parents view, at a great
 * distance, under a governor, when they think themselves to be
 * too much men to be governed by others, and yet have not pru-
 * dence and experience enough to govern themselves, what is it
 * but to expose them to all the greatest dangers of their whole
 * life, when they have the least fence or guard against them? "Till
 * that boiling boisterous part of life comes in, it may be hoped the
 * tutor may have some authority: neither the stubbornness of
 * age, nor the temptation or example of others, can take him
 * from his tutor's conduct 'till fifteen or sixteen: but then, when
 * he begins to consort himself with men, and thinks himself one;
 * when he comes to relish, and pride himself in manly vices, and
 * thinks it a shame to be any longer under the conduct and con-
 * troul of another, what can be hoped from even the most care-
 * ful and discreet governor, when neither he has power to compel,
 * nor his pupil a disposition to be persuaded; but, on the contrary,
 * has the advice of warm blood, and prevailing fashion, to hearken
 * to the temptations of his companions, just as wise as himself,
 * rather than to the persuasions of his tutor, who is now looked
 * on as an enemy to his freedom? And when is man so likely to mis-
 * carry, as when at the same time he is both raw and unruly?"

* This

‘ This is the season of all his life that most requires the eye
 ‘ and authority of his parents and friends to govern it. The in-
 ‘ flexibleness of the former part of a man’s age, not yet grown
 ‘ up to be headstrong, makes it more governable and safe; and in
 ‘ the after-part, reason and foresight begin a little to take place,
 ‘ and mind a man of his safety and improvement.’

Milton, in speaking on the same subject, upon a supposition
 that his new plan were adopted, has the following passage: ‘ We
 ‘ should not then need the *Monseurs* of Paris to take our youth
 ‘ into their flight and prodigal custodies, and send them back
 ‘ again, transformed into mimicks, apes, and keckshose. But if
 ‘ they desire to see other countries, at two or three and twenty
 ‘ years of age, not to learn principles, but to enlarge experience,
 ‘ and make wise observation, they will by that time be such as
 ‘ shall deserve the regard and honour of all men, where they pass;
 ‘ and the society and friendship of all those, in all places, who
 ‘ are best and most eminent. And perhaps then other nations
 ‘ will be glad to visit us for their breeding, or else to imitate us
 ‘ in their own country.’

‘ Or such as chose to enter life immediately at home, might
 ‘ then engage in their several professions and offices, properly
 ‘ prepared and qualified to make a figure in them; to their own
 ‘ great ease and satisfaction, as well as improvement of their for-
 ‘ tunes. Or whether they be to speak in parliament or council,
 ‘ honour and attention would be waiting on their lips. There
 ‘ would then also appear in pulpits, other visages, other gestures,
 ‘ and stuff otherwise wrought, than what we now sit under,
 ‘ oft-times to as great a trial of our patience, as any other that
 ‘ they preach to us.’

Dr. Berkley, the great bishop of Cloyne, among others, has put the following Queries, in a pamphlet called the *Querist*:

‘ Whether a general good taste in a people would not greatly conduce to their thriving? and whether an uneducated gentry be not the greatest of national evils?

‘ Whether our peers and gentlemen are born legislators? or whether that faculty be acquired by study and reflection?

‘ Whether to comprehend the real interest of a people, and the means to procure it, doth not imply some fund of knowledge, historical, moral and political, with a faculty of reason improved by learning?

‘ Whether a wise state hath any interest nearer heart, than the education of youth?

‘ What right the eldest son hath to the worst education?

‘ Whether in any order a good building can be made of bad materials? or whether any form of government can make a happy state of bad materials?

‘ Whether it is possible that a state should not thrive, whereof the lower part were industrious, and the upper wise?

‘ Whether Homer’s compendium of education,

Μυθῶν τε ρήτηρ εἶμεναι πρῆκτῆρα τε ἐργῶν*,

‘ would not be a good rule for modern education of youth? and whether half the learning and study of these kingdoms is not

* This is a line from a speech of Phoenix to Achilles, in the 9th book of the *Iliad*; and may be thus translated:

Train’d up alike in eloquence and arms.

‘ useless,

‘useless, for want of a proper delivery and pronounciation being taught in our schools and colleges?’

In another place he says,—“ Our prospect is very terrible, and the symptoms grow stronger every day. The morals of a people are in this, like their fortunes; when they feel a national shock, the worst doth not shew itself immediately. Things make a shift to subsist for a time on the credit of old notions and dying opinions. But the youth born and brought up in wicked times, without any bias to good from early principle, or instilled opinion, when they grow ripe, must be monsters indeed. And it is to be feared that age of monsters is not far off.”

After such authorities as I have above quoted, and many others which I might have adduced, had there been occasion for it, I think I run no hazard in affirming, that our course of Education is to the last degree erroneous, and that a reformation there is essentially necessary to the future welfare of these realms. But this is an arduous task; not to be attempted by any single hand, and which will require the vigorous and steady support of numbers to ensure its success. As to the great ones of the world, I have little hopes of any aid from them. They are for the most part too much engaged in selfish pursuits, to turn their thoughts to what concerns the general good only; and find their private interests too closely connected with corruption, not to wish its increase, rather than its diminution. Yet, though public spirit has long been laughed out of all bodies of men, it is to be hoped there are many individuals who have not yet lost all sense of it; who repine at the calamitous state to which our affairs are brought, but considering the inefficacy of their single efforts, sit down in a state of silent despondence. But if, by any means, men of this description could be brought together to a considerable amount, the

fight of their numbers might revive their courage, and give them hopes of success from the efforts of their united strength. It was with this view that I have proposed the best means that occurred to me of drawing together a select company, to a course of dissertations on subjects of the highest importance to the Public; that I might have full room to expatiate on the comprehensive topics mentioned in my plan; in order to prepare them for the final proposal of reviving a Plan of Education, once under the solemn deliberation of the higher powers, and highly approved of, though it unfortunately failed of success. As this was a remarkable transaction, though but little known, I shall lay it before the Reader, as it is recorded in the Parliamentary History.

‘ The same day the Lord Admiral Buckingham made a motion to the house, ‘ That since the Education of youth, especially of quality and worth, is a matter of great consequence; therefore to provide that such persons, *in their tender years, do not spend* their time fruitlessly about the town or elsewhere, his lordship wished that some good and fit course might be taken, for the erection and maintenance of an Academy, for the breeding and bringing up of the Nobility and Gentry of this kingdom, in their younger and more tender age: and for a free and voluntary contribution from persons of honour and quality for that purpose.’

‘ This motion was generally liked and commended; and many grave and judicious speeches were used by several lords, touching the most considerable and material points, and the perfect accomplishment of this most honourable project. Some, concerning the place where such an academy should be placed and erected: others, what qualifications, arts, sciences, and exercises

‘ should be there taught and practised ; then how to be maintained, and to what kind of young gentlemen freedom shall be given, to resort or live as they shall please ; with other circumstances.

‘ And in order that the matters and points aforesaid, might with more conveniency be opened and discussed, the House was adjourned during pleasure.’

The consequence of their meeting after this adjournment, is afterwards thus related :

‘ Then the House appointed a Committee to consider of the Academy aforementioned ; consisting of the Prince, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor, the Archbishop of ~~York, the Lord Treasurer, the Lord Admiral, the Earl of Oxford,~~ and many others. The Chief Justice and the Attorney-general to attend them. To meet at the Council-chamber in Whitehall.’

That this noble undertaking did not succeed, was owing, in the first place, to some heats, which about that time broke out in the House of Commons, and which occasioned the dissolution of that Parliament ; and in the next, to the death of the Duke of Buckingham, its author and promoter, which followed soon after.

Unfortunately for their posterity indeed, this noble design of our ancestors did not take place. Had it succeeded, it is more than probable Great Britain would not be in the deplorable condition to which she is now reduced. Let not therefore future generations have the same cause to complain of our neglect, and
lay

lay their ruin at our door. Is it not amazing that from that hour to this the state of Education should never have come even into the contemplation of our Senate? In the present critical state of things they may justly plead the necessity of giving their whole attention to objects of more immediate pressure; and this may serve as an excuse for a long time to come. But if, in the mean time, a society were formed to smoothe the way, and prepare the plan; if one small academy only were established on that plan, and the good fruits of such an institution seen, there can be no doubt but that it would meet the sanction and support of the legislature on a more enlarged scale, upon application made by so respectable a body. If there be any virtue left in this country, it will not be long ere such a society will be formed: or if all public spirit be indeed extinct, it is to be hoped that the natural affection of parents will make them unite, to assist in opening a new channel for their dear young ones to sail safely down the stream of life; and not desperately set them afloat on the old one, from whose hidden rocks, quicksands, and whirlpools, few escape.

Mr. Sheridan's Course, &c. will commence on the first Friday in Lent, the 7th of March, at Hickford's Great Room, Brewer-street. To begin precisely at Seven in the evening. Plans of the Course to be had gratis of Mr. Doddsley in Pall-mall; Mr. Evans, bookseller in the Strand; Mr. Dilly in the Poultry; and at Hickford's Room. Where also Subscriptions are received, and Tickets delivered out.



